

STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM FOR CAPEVERDEAN SECONDARY SCHOOL TEENAGERS

1. Introduction

As educational requirements become more rigorous in all levels of education, students everywhere tend to experience considerable levels of school stress. Some factors that lead to this problem can be identified as academic workload, extra-curricular activities, school pressure, parents' expectations and self pressure due to future uncertainties, (Pope & Simon, 2005). This literature review will give an extensive review of literature related to the effectiveness of stress management strategies in order to identify the most suitable strategies for secondary school students aged 17 years old. This literature review will then apply these strategies in the context of a Cape Verdean, secondary school, located in West Africa. First, it will describe the context of secondary school students in Cape Verde, then it will critically explore and analyze the literature review about the theories and practices of efficient stress management programs for students of age group 17. Ultimately, this essay will seek to help the secondary school authorities of Cape Verde to better assist students with stress difficulties.

2. Cape Verdean Secondary School Contexts

According to the Educacao (2013), Cape Verdean Secondary Education Level is intended to facilitate the acquisition of Scientific Technological and Cultural foundations. This level of education seeks to provide the students important and sufficient tools, in order to continue their academic studies or enter the labour market. This level of education lasts for six years. It is organised in three cycles of two years each. The students have the opportunity for an early exit in the second cycle with a

professional certificate. This allows the students with low financial resources to enter the labour market and continue the studies later.

The students at this level of education are usually seventeen years old. They are usually on the last year for high school graduation. They usually face a number of challenges, which create stressful situations. For example, in order to graduate they must pass a compulsory National Test. So, they tend to put more pressure on themselves at this stage. Another factor that increase their level of stress is the fact that as Cape Verde is a developing country, this makes that many students come from a low class family, with little or no financial resources to continue their studies. So, most of the times they are uncertain about their future, as regarding academic continuity or finding a job. Furthermore, the ones who can afford to go to universities are submitted to a mandatory entry test. All these factors together tend to provoke or increase considerably the level of stress between students of this age group, (Stephen & Gary, 2007).

Despite some efforts by the Schools and the Ministry of Education to reduce the level and the number of students who suffer from stress, there are still a significant number of students who face this challenge. As a consequence, it is generally perceived that students who suffer from any levels of stress tend to experience an increased risk of academic difficulties, drug abuse and emotional problems, (Educacao, 2013).

According to Moura (2009) almost all the secondary schools in Cape Verde are equipped with laboratories, libraries, sports facilities and computer rooms. This proves that in terms of materialistic resources, in similarities with the rest of western education system, Cape Verdean education system prepares its students for competing at a global level. This is necessary, but has the unintended consequences of increasing the level of stress and anxiety, since the standard of quality and requirements are

usually higher. Cape Verdean Schools like other schools around the globe are failing to look after the emotional health of the students. David (1999), affirms that although the schools are technologically equipped, they must develop programs of entertainment and social life improvement for students as well. Currently, in Cape Verdean secondary schools, there are little or no programs of stress management to assist students in developing a health and sustained social relation or to help them deal with the academic demands.

According to Chisholm (2004), ideally, schools should be a place where students can develop themselves in social harmony, without being stressed. However, if the necessary conditions for this purpose are not achieved, it can generate significant challenges for the students. For example it can establish itself as an obstacle to development, which may create stress, which in turn can provoke distance and fissures between students, with more adverse consequences, such as bullying and depression. For these reasons, it is crucial that Cape Verdean Secondary School consider the following the strategies in the next paragraphs.

3. Stress Management Theories and Practices

According to Umair, Aisha, and Muhammad (2013), stress can be defined as "a state of mental or emotional strain or suspense". Similarly, Stephen and Gary (2007) explain that it usually occurs in a moment when the individual loses the ability to manage the tension of situation. Stephen and Gary (2007), reinforce that stress can come from different sources, and sometimes from the simplest activities such as school presentations and assignment deadlines.

A wide review of the literature suggests that stress can be effectively managed. For example, Pope and Simon (2005) state that if schools have a creative strategy plan, stress can be significantly reduced among students. Some of these diverse and complementary strategies will be outlined and discussed in the following section.

3.1. Self Awareness

According to McNamara and Ebooks (2001), self awareness is the ability to perceive aspects of our personality, behavior, emotions, motivations, and thought process. For McNamara and Ebooks (2001), this ability is one the most effective way of managing stress. This technique is important because it gives the individual a sense of power and control over the circumstances that may stressfully affect his or her life. McNamara and Ebooks (2001) reinforce that if people act in this way they will be surprised about how well they can react towards stressful moments. In this perspective, by recognising when and why the person is under stress is crucial to prevent stress as well as a benefit in the solution seeking process, (McNamara and Ebooks, 2001). This idea is also defended by Foot (1990), who argues that by understanding the origin of stress, the solution can be more accurate. Foot (1990), explains that by finding the source of the problem, one can modify the way of thinking and proceeding. Foot (1990), defends that this method is better than trying to change what is already happening. So in this regard, it is important that the schools develop or incorporate in their curriculum, subjects related to stress and management strategy. This may greatly build student capacity to deal with stress issue by them, before they escalate to a higher level, which may impact not only their academic success, but also the school community dynamic.

3.2 Predicting Stressful situations

Stress can also be managed through prediction of stressful situations, (McNamara and Ebooks, 2001). Within this strategy, McNamara and Ebooks (2001) suggests that students need to be able to predict the situation that usually make them feel stressed. As the body and the mind usually respond to the situations according to the state of mind, this technique becomes important to be mastered. Therefore, by predicting the stressful situations, the person can reduce the anxiety and remain calm during the event, (McNamara and Ebooks, 2001).

3.3. Relaxation Room at Schools

According to Thomas and Scott (1987) the creation of relaxation room in the schools may be extremely beneficial to help students manage stress. Thomas and Scott (1987) illustrate a case study in Arizona State University, where a relaxation room was built. In this room, students spent their spare time while receiving significant inputs about stress alleviating techniques through diverse equipment strategically designed. Thomas and Scott (1987) explained that the room was furnished with a small lamp, a expanded lounge chair, a table and tape recorder. It was also painted with a soft color, decorated with posters of nature scenes, and carpeted. The walls were strategically decorated with some posters that reflected stress alleviation. These posters were collections of stress symptoms and the techniques found to be most effective in alleviating them. Inside the room, there were leaflets explaining each of the methods on the posters. There were also provided some leaflets with other subjects such as insomnia, cognitive restructuring, T'ai Chi, and Yoga. There were also ongoing videos about techniques mentioned on the posters, such as self-hypnosis, autogenic, and progressive relaxation, as well as new age music, environmental sounds, and

comedy tracks. Student's evaluation forms were also in the room so that the school board could respond to students' feedback. Thomas and Scott (1987) highlights that as the year progressed, the room was increasingly in use.

3.4. School Guidance officers

Another useful strategy to help student alleviate stress is for schools to have permanent counseling officers, Pope and Simon (2005). According to Arizona State Dept. of Education (2004), School Guidance officers are professionals whose job is to provide counselling and support to students suffering a range of debilitating issues or problems. Furthermore, In their program of intervention and help, Guidance officers are expected to work closely not only with students but also with their families, teachers, non-teaching professionals and in some instances departmental agencies and authorities.

Additionally, Justina (2007) highlights that School Guidance Officers are vital to assist students with issues in school curriculum, personal and public relations, behavior, career counseling, and life skills. According to Justina (2007) the schools Guidance Officers are considered to be a effective tool for school to stand as a community problem solver. They are vital for the school community life, since they establish a safe and healthy relationship between the school community members, which foster a safer and healthier environment for learning and for developing sustainable human relations. In Cape Verdean secondary school context, their role would be essential to ease the students anxiety towards the national tests and the universities' entry test. They would be also important to help parents understand the level of pressure that the students are submitted through and thus better support their children at home with encouragements, rather than making more pressure.

To reinforce the idea of having guidance officers in the schools, Pope and Simon (2005), illustrate an example of an experience from Wheatley School High School in New York. In this school, students usually considered themselves as "robot-students." Due to the overload and pressure from schools works, they became weary and living in a continuous moment of stress. As a solution, Pope and Simon (2005) suggested that the schools should approach the issue by promoting psychological health initiatives. The schools were advised to provide and encourage students to attend the counseling services, as an essential form to prevent stress, rather than curing it. Pope and Simon (2005) explained for example, that in this office students should be taught about time management, stress reduction, yoga and meditation. After this experiment, the students emotional condition and stress level were amazingly improved.

4. Recommendations

Providing technology is not the only element necessary for supporting students in the 21st century. Although Moura (2009) has argued that almost every school in Cape Verde is now equipped with all the required material resources such as computers, it is very important that the school and the educational authorities understand that the schools should pay attention to the quality of life of its community in this case the students. As in Cape Verde, little attention is paid to life quality of the students within the schools. There is an urgent need to convince the superior authorities of education, such as the Ministry of Education to start reflecting on further methods to minimize the stress among the students.

Therefore the first recommendation would be to create a policy to provide the schools with Guidance Officers. This is of high importance because Guidance Officers are

responsible to develop and implement interventions or programs to assist not only the students, but also the school community in general.

Second, it would be extremely important if the schools could arrange a relaxation room. The literature review presented above has revealed that this room is very beneficial to help students alleviate stress. So by making a combination between the provision of School Guidance Officers, the Relaxation Room and the teaching of stress anticipation techniques the probability to efficiently prevent and support students with stress may be considerably achieved.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review has researched and outlined current strategies for managing student stress. This research essay has applied and recommended four of these strategies to Cape Verdeans school context. The final goal of this literature review is to help the Cape Verdean Secondary Schools to find the best strategies to help students manage stress.

It is clear that the world has become a highly interconnected place, and it is changing at a fast speed. For example, the powerful people and the ones who perform well are also changing. So, the educational authorities should guarantee that all students are safely involved in this changing process, including the students at Cape Verdean secondary schools. It is vital that the educational authorities realize that the way the students in the 21st century are supported has to change, because only providing materialistic resources, such as computers are not enough. They need to be taught how to interact with each other and how to protect their emotional health, if the aim is to build safer, healthier and self-sustainable individuals and communities in general.

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